

## MASSACHUSETTS RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

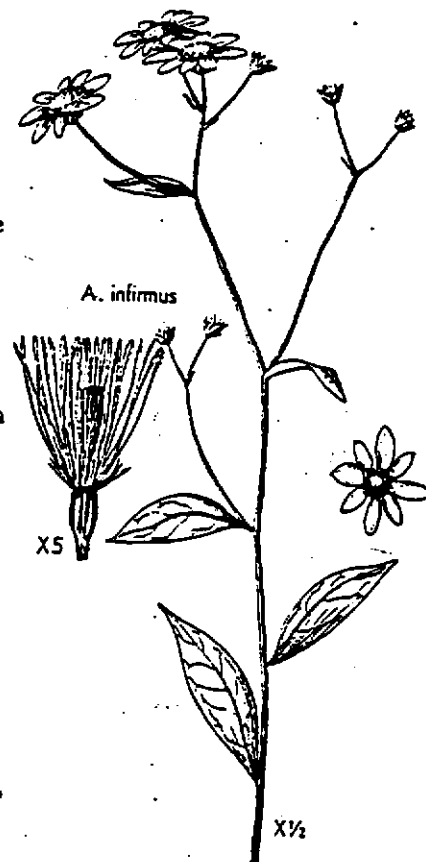
### CORNEL-LEAVED ASTER (Aster infirmus Michx.)

#### DESCRIPTION

Aster infirmus is a slender, erect, perennial herb of the Composite family. It grows from 1 to 3 feet (.3-1.0m.) with a single, glabrous (smooth), unbranched, somewhat zig-zag stem. The leaves are 2-5" (6-13cm.) long, simple, entire margined, elliptical, and smooth except for hairy veins beneath. The leaves are few in number, alternately arranged, and the same size along the length of the stem. The flowers, which appear from late July to September, are about 1" (3cm.) across with 5 to 9 broad, bright white petals and are arranged in corymb-like inflorescences. The fruit is a glabrous achene (a small, dry fruit with a single seed) with bristles. Aster infirmus overwinters as a low rosette of leaves. The best time to identify the plant is in mid-August, when it is in fullest flower.

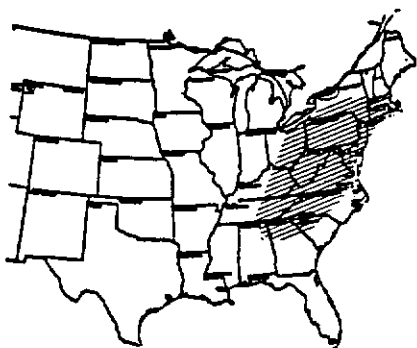
#### SIMILAR SPECIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

Aster umbellatus is quite similar, but is a much larger, leafier plant with leaves that are scabrous (rough) on top, whereas Aster infirmus leaves are smooth. Aster infirmus leaves superficially resemble the leaves of Grey Dogwood (Cornus racemosa), hence the common name, Cornel-leaved Aster. The specific name, "infirmus," refers to the somewhat weak or fragile appearance in comparison to many other asters.



adapted from  
Britton, E.L. and S.A. Brown. An Illustrated  
Flora of the Northern United States and Canada.  
Dover Publications, Inc. 1970 reprint of 1913 ed.

(continued overleaf)



Distribution of Aster infirmus



● Verified since 1978  
○ Reported prior to 1978

Distribution in Massachusetts by Town

## CORNEL-LEAVED ASTER (continued)

### HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS

Cornel-leaved Aster has been found on non-acidic, dry, rocky, wooded slopes in partial shade with co-occurring species including hickories (Carya ovalis and C. tomentosa), oaks (Quercus rubra and Q. alba), Black Birch (Betula lenta), tick-trefoils (Desmodium spp.), and golden-rods (Solidago spp.). However, it may also be found in moister woods with oaks (Quercus rubra and Q. bicolor) and American Hazelnut (Corylus americana). It avoids full sunlight. On Massachusetts sites, Aster infirmus is growing in woods with an open shrub layer and a moderately open tree canopy. There are approximately 100 individuals in each of the populations.

### RANGE

Cornel-leaved Aster is distributed from Massachusetts to Ohio, south to South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.

### POPULATION STATUS

Cornel-leaved Aster is considered endangered in Massachusetts. There are only two current occurrences (1978 to present), but eight occurrences are historically cited for Massachusetts. One of the present sites is endangered by adjacent road construction. The other is immediately adjacent to a jogging trail and is crossed by informal trails. The expansion of these paths might endanger this population. This site has been subject to periodic light fires, which do not appear to have harmed the population. Additionally, the development of a dense shrub layer may inhibit Cornel-leaved Aster.